

Washington of Jock

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THE BRAWL OVER 'TAINTED' DELEGATES

It's springtime in a typical Presidential election year for the Democrats, and the scent of blood is in the air. Swept up in an increasingly bitter battle for the party nomination, the Democrats are preparing to carve themselves up in a series of confrontations over platform issues (page 72). But the nastiest fight at the convention in San Francisco July 16-19 may come over attempts by Gary Hart and Jesse Jackson to unseat "tainted" delegates pledged to Walter F. Mondale.

Up to now, Hart and Jackson have been pursuing their own separate agendas on the rules dispute. Hart trails Mondale by about 640 delegates. He has threatened to challenge 510 Mondale delegates who he claims were improperly elected with the help of labor-backed "delegate committees" that Mondale has since disbanded.

Jackson, meanwhile, claims that a provision that denies delegates to a candidate who fails to win 20% of the vote in a congressional district has denied him hundreds of delegates. Jackson has won 21% of the popular vote, but has only 9% of the delegates. He is demanding that the party give him 383 "earned but unawarded delegates."

Now, with Mondale increasingly unlikely to wrap up the nomination when the primaries end on June 5, Hart and Jackson seem to be inexorably moving toward a series of credentials fights—and perhaps a joint challenge—culminating in a convention floor fight. Since there is little chance that the 20% threshold rule will be changed retroactively, Jackson has opened a new front in his war on the Establishment by echoing Hart's concern over "tainted" delegates. Asserts Hart: "The standing of those delegates is in very, very serious question."

A COMBINED HART-JACKSON credentials challenge would face great obstacles, however. Democrats have not unseated a state contingent since 1964, when the all-white Mississippi delegation was thrown out of the convention. And pro-Mondale forces dominate both the rules and credentials committees. "Hart and

Jackson have as much chance of unseating Mondale's delegates as I have of flying," snorts one top party official.

The credentials fight will be the Democrats' first order of business when the convention opens. It is improbable that this desperation tactic will succeed in denying Mondale the nomination that is now almost within his grasp. What is far more likely is that the coming delegate brawl will leave a legacy of bitterness within the party that will make post-convention unity hard to achieve.

WANTED: DEMOCRATS FOR ICC VACANCIES

After nearly 18 months of political negotiation, the Administration is back to Square One in trying to fill three long-vacant Democratic seats on the Interstate Commerce Commission. It managed to work out a compromise with Chairman Bob Packwood (R-Ore.) of the Senate Commerce, Science & Transportation Committee, who has long criticized the ICC's slow pace in deregulating trucking. But the deal has come unstuck because of objections by ICC Chairman Reese H. Taylor Jr., who is less than an ardent deregulator.

Packwood, whose committee would have to confirm any new nominees, agreed to accept Paul H. Lamboley, a Nevada labor lawyer, and J. J. Simmons III, who was Interior Under Secretary during the tenure of former Secretary James G. Watt. Packwood views both as questionable deregulators, and Democrats on his committee view Simmons as a questionable Democrat because of his close ties to Watt. But Packwood and the Democrats were placated by the other selection—Richard B. Felder, a former ICC official and lawyer.

Taylor, however, objected to having another strong deregulator such as Felder on the commission. So he took his objections to his former law partner, Senator Paul Laxalt (R-Nev.). The influential Laxalt persuaded the White House to back out of the deal.

SECURITIES

The government's investigation of the collapse of a Hawaiian investment firm, Bishop, Baldwin, Rewald, Dillingham & Wong, is pitting Securities & Exchange Commission enforcement chief John M. Fedders against his predecessor, Stanley Sporkin. Sporkin, now the Central Intelligence Agency's general counsel, set the standard by which Fedders is often judged at the SEC. But the SEC is investigating the firm's claims of CIA ties with which it lured investors, who lost millions. The CIA is denying any substantial involvement, and Sporkin, once the investor's champion, is defending its position.

COMMUNICATIONS

President Reagan will soon approve a new policy permitting private U.S. companies to compete with the International Telecommunications Satellite Organization (Intelsat), the 108-nation consortium that has a near-monopoly on overseas satellite communications. But Reagan must first decide whether the State Dept. or the Commerce Dept. will chair the inter-agency group having jurisdiction over the new competition. Although the U.S. is a member of Intelsat, represented by the Communications Satellite Corp. (Comsat), it can sanction competition that causes the consortium no "significant" financial damage.

TRADE

President Reagan will nominate George Nesterchuk, an associate director in the Office of Personnel Management, as administrator of export and import controls in the Commerce Dept. The post has been vacant since Lawrence J. Brady, a hard-liner on Soviet trade, resigned to run for Congress. Nesterchuk is expected to use his management expertise to reduce a mounting backlog of export license applications.